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Statement of Chair Jane Harman

Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing & Terrorism Risk Assessment

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“Using the Web as a Weapon: the Internet as a Tool for Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism”

AS PREPARED:

Last month, the New York Times introduced the world to Samir Khan, a 21-year old American living at his parent’s house in North Carolina.

Khan has been operating one of the most active English-language websites on the planet – one that promotes a radicalized view of Islam and violence against Americans here at home.

It hosts hundreds of links to videos showing American soldiers being killed by Iraqi insurgents, including a file called “United States of Losers” which showcases a recent news broadcast about a firefight in Afghanistan.

Khan’s commentary on the site reads, “You can even see an American soldier hiding during the ambush like a baby. AllahuAkbar! AllahuAkbar!”

Khan’s is not an isolated case.

This past August, Ahmed Mohamed and Youssef Megahed (“Ma-GAH-Head”), 21-year old University of South Florida engineering students, were stopped for speeding in Goose Creek, South Carolina.

The stop resulted in a two-count federal indictment on terrorism-related charges.

When questioned by federal agents, Mohamed admitted to using the Internet to post a 12-minute YouTube video demonstrating in Arabic how to turn a toy boat into a bomb.

He told the F.B.I. that he made the video to teach “those persons in Arabic countries to defend themselves against the infidels invading their countries.”

And in March of this year, Hassan Abujihaad (“Abou-jihad”) – a.k.a. Paul R. Hall – was arrested in Phoenix, Arizona, on charges that he supported terrorism by disclosing secret information about the location of Navy ships and the best ways to attack them.

The investigation of Abujihaad (“Abou-jihad”), a former U.S. Navy sailor, began with an Internet service provider in Connecticut. Abujihaad (Abou-jihad”) is believed to have exchanged emails and information with a British computer specialist arrested in Great Britain in 2004 for running terror financing websites.

In September of last year, Adam Gadahn – the son of Jewish parents from southern California who himself converted to Islam and went on to become Osama bin Laden’s spokesman – released a 45-minute video on the Internet called “An Invitation to Islam”.

In that video, Gadahn talks about al Qaeda’s ideology, rationale, and motivations – encouraging Americans to sympathize with the group. There can be no doubt: the Internet is increasingly being used as a tool to reach and radicalize Americans and legal residents.

These people no longer need to travel to foreign countries or isolated backwoods compounds to become indoctrinated by extremists and to learn how to kill their neighbors.

On the contrary, the Internet allows them to share violent goals and plot from the comfort of their own living rooms – a problem the President’s own recently released National Strategy for Homeland Security tells us is not going away.

How we address violent radicalization – while respecting the Constitution in the process – is not easy. There is no magic pill or rulebook or law that will fix this.

But there are steps to take. Representative Reichert and I are the co-authors of H.R. 1955 – the Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007 – which passed the House 404 to 6 several weeks ago.

The centerpiece of H.R. 1955 is the creation of a National Commission to study violent radicalization; to determine the best way forward; and to make concrete proposals for action.

At six months intervals over eighteen months, the National Commission would drill down on the issue and propose to both Congress and Secretary Chertoff initiatives to intercede before radicalized individuals turn violent.

We are not afraid of where the facts will take us. But no one on the Hill or elsewhere should think we already have a complete understanding of how someone with radical beliefs becomes a violent killer.

Many in the Senate likewise support our call for a National Commission. My colleague and friend, Susan Collins of Maine, recently introduced companion legislation that would make the Commission a reality.

I look forward to working with the Senate to get a bill to the President’s desk before the end of this session.

I welcome the witness’ testimony today about the Internet and how it is being abused by violent extremists.

I believe their remarks will be a valuable starting point for the National Commission’s work.